

# Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Council

## 2007 Report to the Governor

*The Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Council advises and works with the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to improve policies, programs, delivery of services to consumers, and methods for reaching potential consumers and employers.*

### MVR Stats at a Glance

- In 2007, Montana Vocational Rehabilitation (MVR) provided services to 4,136 consumers who were engaged in an Individualized Plan of Employment.
- The total cost for the entire VR work program was \$15.5 million.
- 912 Montanans with disabilities went to work in 2007 with the assistance of Montana Vocational Rehabilitation.
- 79% of rehabilitated cases were significantly disabled.
- Noteworthy Statistics:
  - Average MVR Consumer Wage Per Hour = \$10.20
  - Combined Annual Salaries of MVR Consumers for 2007 = \$14.4 million
  - Average hours worked per week = 31 hours

### A MESSAGE FROM THE COUNCIL

On behalf of the State Rehabilitation Council, I am proud to present the Annual Report to the Governor for 2007.

The Council is committed to our mission of advising and working with the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. To that end, we actively promoted and supported the funding and operation of the VR Program through multiple activities across the state. This report highlights many of those activities, accomplishments and recommendations and also provides dramatic data showing the effectiveness and importance of the function of VR to Montana's citizens, economy and society where every person is valued.

The financial gain afforded MVR consumers and the state of Montana is substantial and those statistics are related in detail elsewhere in this report. The dignity, pride and sense of purpose gained through employment of individuals with disabilities are incalculable.

In addition to its "work" program, MVR serves Montanans with disabilities in its Independent Living Program (1,603 consumers), Older Blind Program (636 consumers), Extended Employment Program (301 consumers), Montana Telecommunications Access Program (957 consumers), Visual Medical Program (96 consumers), and Business Enterprise Program (5 vending routes).

Through this report, we re-confirm the commitment of the Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Council members who, for the past twelve months, have worked diligently on behalf of individuals with disabilities. Our Council is committed to assisting and advising Montana Vocational Rehabilitation in empowering all individuals with disabilities to achieve competitive employment and independence in their communities and in our great state.

Dick Trerise, Chair  
Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Council

Success Stories

MVR serves consumers with all types of disabilities. This year we have chosen to feature success stories of consumers who are visually impaired. These consumers are served by the Blind and Low Vision Services (BLVS) staff who are a part of Montana Vocational Rehabilitation.

Dorothy Mae\* has been legally blind from optic nerve atrophy since age 10. She had worked at a variety of jobs, mostly service and assembly work, in another state before moving to Missoula in 2003. Dorothy Mae decided to go back to school, stating, "The ultimate goal is to achieve a level of education that will make it possible to get off of SSDI." Using a variety of tools, including low vision aids and magnification software, Dorothy Mae maintained a 4.0 GPA in her Master of Accountancy at the University. Blind and Low Vision services assisted with the cost of tuition, books, the CPA exam and some relocation expenses. Dorothy Mae became employed as an accountant earning a starting wage of \$43,700 a year.

Jonathan\* has retinitis pigmentosa, which caused significant field loss. His skills were limited, and he desired a job where he could work with his hands. Many job options were considered, and the Career Guidance Center arranged a job tryout with a local manufacturer. A job coach provided on-the-job training. Significant attention was given to Jonathan's safety getting to and from the job, functioning within the facility and performing the job tasks. An orientation and mobility specialist identified lighting needs above the work space and provided cane and orientation training to Jonathan. Jonathan started working part-time and is being considered for additional hours as he learns new skills. Even though Jonathan's vision is significantly impaired, his work production and quality are extremely high. The employer is very satisfied with his work performance, and Jonathan enjoys the work environment.

\* Names have been changed to protect the privacy of the individual

Native American Vocational Rehabilitation

Each year, this report highlights one of the state's six Native American Vocational Rehabilitation projects. These projects are funded directly by the federal government to the Tribes. This year the Blackfeet Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Program (BTVR) is featured.

Since October 2000 the Blackfeet Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Program (BTVR) has provided vocational rehabilitation services sensitive to the needs and cultural values of tribal members with disabilities who live on or near the Blackfeet Reservation. Although the Blackfeet Reservation has a 70% unemployment rate, BTVR provided 49 employment plans with 14 successful job placements.

An annual disabilities day conference is usually held on September 30<sup>th</sup>. However, as the focus is employment, the name and date have been changed to "Career Empowerment Day" and it is held in October. In addition, BTVR holds an annual POW-WOW, the last POW-WOW of the season that includes traditional dancing, costume dancing of all age groups/categories and an honorary dance for staff.

The Blackfeet Manpower program, of which BTVR is a part of, was certified in August 2007 as the first Tribal program in the Nation to become a one-stop program.

Program staff include: George Kipp IV, Manpower Director; Sharyl Wells, Project Coordinator; Thea After Buffalo, Counselor/ Case Manager; Elizabeth Wells, Benefits Planner/ Case Manager; Maynard Kicking Women, Cultural Coordinator; and Sharlene Bremner, Receptionist/ Intake Specialist.

Consumer Satisfaction

The Council, in partnership with MVR and South Dakota State University, conducts, analyzes and reviews the consumer satisfaction survey for the general program and Blind and Low Vision (BLV) program. MVR uses this information to evaluate consumer needs, staff training needs, operational planning needs and needed changes to policies and procedures. The results of the survey are summarized below:

Results

- 1) How would you rate the quality of services you received?

General

BLV

83% excellent/good

95% excellent/good
- 2) In an overall general sense, how satisfied are you with the service you received?

General

BLV

86% satisfied

90% satisfied
- 3) If you were to seek help again, would you come back to our program?

General

BLV

91% yes

88% yes
- 4) I was involved in choosing my goals and services.

General

BLV

87% involved

95% involved

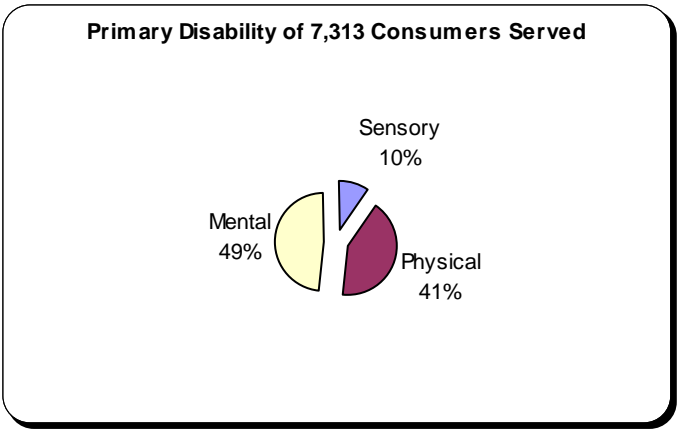
Council Accomplishments

- The Council provided a forum for cultural education by holding a Council meeting on the Blackfeet Reservation. This meeting was hosted by the Blackfeet Manpower Program.
- With the Council's encouragement, MVR hired a transition counselor/program officer to directly serve consumers and to develop transition practices.
- With the Council's encouragement, MVR strengthened and expanded connections with the business community to improve employment opportunities and outcomes for consumers.
- In 2007 Dick Trerise, MVR Council Chair, attended the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) in Washington DC. He met with the congressional delegation and gave them a report on last year's MVR outcomes.

Council Recommendations

- Look at the needs of urban Native Americans with disabilities who do not live on the reservation.
- Develop a public relations plan to reach students with disabilities, parents, school staff, and community agencies on transition services.
- Increase the percentage of rehabilitated consumers who have health insurance at closure.
- Encourage each region to hold a focus group on mental health issues.
- Establish a liaison with the Department of Corrections and become familiar with their programs related to disability.

Who We Serve



MVR Council Members

David Boyd, Sr.- Poplar, Denise Corrao - Miles City, Don Jones - Helena, Carol Lambert-Broadus, Ronald Mills - Miles City, Mavis Young Bear - Fort Belknap, Andrea Falcon - Kalispell, Christina Mattlin - Billings, Wayne Nankivel - Helena, Ruth Straley - Helena, Dick Trerise - Helena, Claudette Vance - Kalispell, Dan Burke - Missoula, Jacqueline Colombe - Basin, Faith Dawson - Missoula, Dalayna Faught - Missoula, Maureen Kenneally - Butte, Sharla LaFountain - Great Falls, Paul Pearson - Anaconda, Michelle Williamson - Pablo

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